

Lofgren Speaks Out For Human Rights In Vietnam

Statements of Zoe Lofgren on H.J. Res. 101, to Deny Trade Benefits for Vietnam, and the Congressional Human Rights Caucus - Briefing on Freedom of Expression in Vietnam & the Vietnamese Government's Response

"Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.J.Res. 101 disapproving the extension of waiver authority in section 402(c) of the Trade Act of 19 74 to Vietnam. I am proud to represent a community, Santa Clara County, California, that has been greatly enriched by the contributions of its Vietnamese American residents. For many years, as an immigration attorney, a local elected official, and now as a Member of Congress, I have worked closely with these Americans on two issues close to their hearts and mine-immigration and human rights.

"Quite a few of my constituents came to San Jose as refugees, escaping an oppressive political regime. That is why I value their knowledge, experience and support. That is why I believe that their unique perspective on the US relationship with Vietnam deserves deference. While we are constantly told that the government in Vietnam is making progress in the area of human rights, I continue to hear about political persecution and unwarranted detentions from my friends in the Vietnamese community.

"Later today, the Human Rights Caucus will be holding a hearing on freedom of expression in Vietnam. Article 69 of the Vietnamese Constitution recognizes freedom of opinion, expression and association for all citizens. But the Vietnamese people are denied these privileges daily. Vietnamese authorities continue to censor mail, telephone calls and email. Freedom of the press is a joke-while 500 papers exist in Vietnam not one is privately owned. All radio and television broadcasting are state owned.

"Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have detailed cases and their list of abuses is long. The U.S. State Department and humanitarian groups have reported that the Vietnam's human rights situation has worsened in 2001, especially with respect to ethnic minorities like the Montagnards. There are reports of harassment of prominent dissidents in Vietnam and Hanoi still implements strict control over the press. If Vietnam is making such great strides towards human rights then why are we continuing to hear that those who try to express themselves freely are routinely detained?

"I believe in free trade. I have voted for trade agreements, but I believe the situation in Vietnam is different. Here we have a clear opportunity to change the course of the nations behavior in exchange for trade. I ask my colleagues to support H.J.Res. 101. Stand up to the communists in Vietnam. Insist on human rights in Vietnam in exchange for free trade."

Statement of Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren
Co-Chair, Congressional Human Rights Caucus, Briefing on Freedom of Expression in Vietnam & the Vietnamese Government's Response
Tuesday, July 23, 2002
Washington, DC

"I am honored to Co-Chair the Congressional Human Rights Caucus briefing with my colleagues, Representatives Lantos, Wolf, Sanchez and Davis. I thank them all for their leadership on human rights issues critical to the Vietnamese American community.

"Over the past year, I have been told that the government of Vietnam is making progress in the area of human rights. I inevitably hear of these great strides forward when I am being lobbied to vote for trade benefits for Vietnam. But during my time in Washington, I have learned to listen to the voices of my friends in the Vietnamese American community in San Jose. And from them, I continue to hear stories about persecution, political repression and unwarranted detentions.

"The actions of all nations must be measured against the standards of international behavior to which they have agreed.

Having laws alone is not guarantee that laws will be enforced or respected. This is clear in the case of Vietnam.

“As a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Vietnam is obliged to recognize freedom of expression. Article 69 of its own Constitution states: “the citizen shall enjoy freedom of opinion and speech, freedom of the press, the right to be informed, and the right to assemble...”

“The government of Vietnam repeatedly and consciously violates its international obligations with its relentless persecution of those expressing their right to freedom of expression.

“Today we will hear testimony from individuals who have observed first hand how the Vietnamese authorities repress free expression. I extend my sincere gratitude to all of the individuals who are here today. Collectively your experiences speak to the plight of the Vietnamese people. The information you have conveyed is important to us as policymakers because you are on the front lines of the war for human rights. I thank you for having the courage to be on the frontlines of that war.

“I would especially like to draw attention to the testimony submitted by Mr. Nguyen Vu Binh a democracy activist who is under house detention. His courage in submitting testimony before this Caucus is a testament to his commitment to his homeland and reform of its political institutions. I welcome you all, and I look forward to hearing your testimony.”